

VZCZCXYZ0027
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGT #1199 1691923
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 181923Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3031
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 4341

UNCLAS GUATEMALA 001199

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: COALITION OF U.S.-BASED NGOS IN GUATEMALA
EXPRESSES HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: The Ambassador met with representatives of a coalition of U.S.-based NGOs with a significant presence in Guatemala to discuss human rights. The NGOs expressed concern over recent threats against human rights defenders and discussed the impact of mining in indigenous populated areas where foreign corporations have investment interests. They viewed "femicide" as part of the larger problem of impunity and urged the establishment of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). The Ambassador assured them that the Embassy is continuing to press the Guatemalan Congress for approval of CICIG and is following the mining disputes closely. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador met June 13 with Rights Action, Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA), Sister Parish, and STITCH, four U.S.-based NGOs that have worked in the region for over a decade. They expressed concern over recent threats against human rights defenders, including the Executive Director of the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG), as well as concern over areas where U.S. corporations have significant or potential investment interests, particularly areas with mining concessions and potential hydroelectric projects.

¶3. (SBU) Juliana Bird, Co-Director of Rights Action, expressed particular concern over the human rights situation in San Marcos and the Canadian-owned Marlin gold mine, recalling that a security guard who had killed a protester in 2005 had not been prosecuted, and that legal actions taken against community leaders protesting allegedly fraudulent land acquisitions were politically motivated. The Ambassador said the Embassy has been monitoring areas where foreign corporations have investment interests and that studies show that the gold mine is not adversely impacting the community. He noted he was in contact with the influential Roman Catholic Bishop of San Marcos, a highly visible critic of mining operations. The Ambassador said some of the opposition to the mining was driven by opportunists who view the mine as a ready source of money and that the problem, as with other problems in Guatemala, was part of a larger governability issue.

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution on "femicide" and asked for their views. In his view, gangs and "femicide" were examples of complex issues that are easily misunderstood by those who do not have a complete grasp of the situation in country. While gangs do exist, they are part of the larger problem of impunity, involving narcotrafficking and organized crime. Bird agreed, saying that organized crime uses gangs and that the larger issue is impunity. In that sense, she said the establishment of CICIG, long delayed, is a very important process to support. The Ambassador assured that

the Embassy is continuing to press for its approval.

¶15. (U) On the issue of "femicide," Bird commented that while violence against women is a big problem, it is part of a larger societal problem. She focused on the need to combat the high level of violence in Guatemala, which is second only to Colombia. She noted that Rights Action has been working to improve the lives of women through better access to education.

¶16. (SBU) When asked who might be making the threats against human rights defenders, Bird suspected that the perpetrators were the same people who had committed human rights violations in the 1980s and were probably linked to organized crime. NISGUA's Brehan asserted that lack of accountability for atrocities committed in the 80s was now allowing crimes to flourish with impunity.
Derham